

Convicted fraudsters still on the payroll

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THE DA in KwaZulu-Natal has hit out at the provincial Human Settlements Department for keeping on its payroll more than 400 officials found guilty of fraud estimated at R17 million.

Human Settlements MEC Ravi Pillay replied to a parliamentary question posed by DA MP George Mari, and conceded that there were 485 fraud cases linked to low-income housing subsidies registered with the police. However, there had been 421 successful convictions.

Pillay said 398 cases were finalised by entering into plea bargains.

So far, 1 566 acknowledgements of debt had been signed – thanks to the special investigation, Pillay said.

Added to this, 1 286 government employees had signed acknowledgements of debt totalling R14 million, while 269 had admitted fraud amounting to R2.6m.

Pillay said none of the government employees were dismissed because the presiding officers did not sanction any

dismissals during the disciplinary hearings.

Mari said his party was shocked that none of the officials who admitted to committing fraud were fired and they were still employed by the government.

“It is staggering that, despite the seriousness of the offences, not one official was dismissed. Instead, fines of up to R10 000 or a wholly suspended sentence for five years were meted out.

“The DA will be calling for a full breakdown of the court decisions to gauge the penalties imposed,” Mari said.

“These fraudsters have abused their position as civil servants and need to be punished appropriately,” he said.

Pillay said his department was taking a “very stern approach” to fraud and corruption, and the cases referred to in the parliamentary question were from 1994 to 2007.

“The clear message is that those convicted will not only repay the money and lose their jobs but also face the very real prospect of going to jail,” said Pillay.